

Parking at Megachurches

Managing accessibility, hospitality and
stewardship: A Case Study of Peachtree
Presbyterian Church

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Introduction

This paper examines the transportation management policies, parking capacity, parking usage trends and multi-modal options at Peachtree Presbyterian Church, a mainline, evangelical megachurch, the largest congregation in the Presbyterian Church (USA). Peachtree Presbyterian is located in the heart of the Buckhead district in Atlanta on Roswell Road. The paper seeks to provide insight on current conditions and then also provide recommendations for immediate parking demand management, short-to-middle run strategies to better encourage multi-modal options, especially with new megachurches that may develop.



Figure 1: Main Sanctuary of the Church

Literature Review

While megachurches have been one of the physical presentations of the Protestant faith for centuries, in the past few decades megachurches have grown in number, size and influence throughout the world, but particularly in the USA. In recent decades, the study of megachurches has become more standardized, with megachurches being defined as churches with at least 2,000 members.¹ As some of the most prominent civic associations in the Metro Atlanta region, megachurches are institutional actors that cross race and class, with the majority of megachurches in Atlanta having African-American pastors.² Metro Atlanta ranks 4th in that nation for megachurches³ and has the largest concentration of megachurches, with 46 megachurches with almost 200,000 attendees as of 2010.⁴ Outside of cities in Texas, Atlanta has more megachurches than any other city in America.⁵ Megachurches have largely thrived in the suburban and exurban context and are generally thought of as suburban institutions.⁶ The *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* ran a week-long series on megachurches throughout Metro Atlanta in 2003, and featured megachurches dispersed throughout all of the major counties of Metro Atlanta.⁷ With the population returning to the cities, new megachurches are arriving as well. This literature

¹ Barney Warf & Morton Winsberg, "Geographies of megachurches in the United States," *Journal of Cultural Geography*, 27:1, 2010, 34.

² Ibid.

³ Daniels, Kysa, "Metro Atlanta's Megachurches: Preaching to the Masses," *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, April 19th, 2003, final edition, in News Bank (accessed December 10, 2018).

⁴ Warf and Windberg, "Geographies of megachurches in the United States," 34.

⁵ Wright, Daniel. *Megachurches: A Growing Community Anchor*. (Cornell Real Estate Review. Volume 15. Article 20. 6-2017), 70.

⁶ Warf and Windberg, "Geographies of megachurches in the United States," 34.

⁷ Daniels, Kysa, "Metro Atlanta's Megachurches: Preaching to the Masses," *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, April 19th, 2003, final edition, in News Bank (accessed December 10, 2018).

review provides general context for megachurches, examples and approaches within the Metro Atlanta context. The focus will explore existing conditions of the seven megachurches within Atlanta, exploring their parking management and proximity to MARTA stations. It will also examine the conditions in which choice drivers would consider Sunday transit travel.

The campus size of megachurches differs considerably, depending on whether the church is an urban or suburban church. While megachurches within the city limits of Atlanta such as Passion City Church, Peachtree Presbyterian Church and St. Philips in Buckhead, or Cascade UMC and Ben Hill UMC in Southwest Atlanta own properties in the 10-15 acre range,⁸ in the suburbs the campuses are exponentially larger. Suburban megachurches are extraordinarily large when it comes to campus footprint. Perimeter Church, the largest church in Georgia belonging to the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA), has a campus of 89 acres in Johns Creek.⁹ Conceivably the largest megachurch in Metro Atlanta is in Dekalb County, New Birth Missionary Baptist Church, with a 250 acre campus and at one point, 25,000 in attendance.¹⁰

Plentiful parking has been a necessary condition for the success and growth of the megachurch, which creates traffic and land use challenges with neighboring communities. Traffic and parking challenges have resulted in court cases with a megachurch and their neighbors.¹¹ The flagship evangelical periodical, *Christianity Today*, argues that the megachurch

⁸ Fulton County Property Assessors, “Fulton County Property Map Viewer” <https://gis.fultoncountygga.gov/Apps/PropertyMapViewViewer> (accessed December 7, 2018).

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Williams, Donna Lewis, “Metro Atlanta’s Megachurches: Reaching new heights at New Birth – 25,000 - member congregation boasts close community ties,” April 24, 2003, final edition, in News Bank (accessed December 10, 2018).

¹¹ Ibid.

is a car dependent institution and without the car, megachurches would not exist.¹² Large parking lots and often parking decks are a defining physical characteristic of the site.¹³ Large parking lots are needed both in suburban and urban megachurches as often historic urban megachurches retain members who have long since moved to the peripheries, and churches with distinctive theology also have large catchment area.¹⁴ Parking lots surrounding megachurches often are used a small fraction of the time, with even lower usage rates than urban campuses such as hospitals, malls, universities, office buildings, apartment buildings.¹⁵ Large parking lots provide free parking to parishioners, but the actual costs of parking are hidden as parking is anything but free.¹⁶ How churches think about parking lot ownership has significant effect on the management of the churches institutional finances, as well as taxable land available for city governments.

Managing traffic and transportation access to churches often is a complex undertaking. Often shuttle bus service transports attendees to the church sanctuary. For example, First Baptist Church Woodstock in the NW Atlanta suburbs of Cherokee County has 4,300 parking spaces that are serviced by at least four different color-coded trolleys.¹⁷ While in the Atlanta context, massive, free parking is provided by megachurches, Susan Bratton argues that in the Texan

¹² Adam Graber, "How Cars Created the Megachurch: And put churchgoers in the driver's seat," *Christianity Today*, October, 2014, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/pastors/2014/october-online-only/how-cars-created-megachurch.html> (accessed December 12, 2018).

¹³ Daniel Wright. *Megachurches: A Growing Community Anchor*, 70.

¹⁴ Wilburn Zelinsky, "The Uniqueness of the American Religious Landscape," (*Geographical Review*, 91 (3), 2011), 565-585.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Donald Shoup, *The High Cost of Free Parking*, (Chicago, Illinois: American Planning Association), 2005.

¹⁷ Paynes, Doug. "Metro Atlanta's Megachurches: Woodstock Baptists invite more growth - New facility will seat 7,000," *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, April 24, 2003 final edition, in News Bank (Accessed online December 11, 2018).

megachurch context, megachurches orient themselves around vehicle access, but also focus on public transportation.¹⁸ Thus multi-modal transportation focus has precedence within the modern megachurch movement. Managing transportation and the massive parking lots that support megachurches has become a part of the consulting industry that supports megachurches, with strategies offered on transportation management.¹⁹

As for the intown megachurch scene in Atlanta, the tony Buckhead neighborhood is the capital. In 2003, there were five megachurches (including one synagogue), half of the total of megachurches for the entire city. Since 2003, at least two more megachurches have been founded, and both of them Passion City Church and Buckhead Church are in Buckhead. The historical megachurches (including one synagogue) manage parking through “multilevel parking garages, sprawling parking lots or leasing space from neighboring businesses.”²⁰ The two new arrivals to the Buckhead megachurch scene, Passion City Church near Lindbergh Center and Buckhead Church, differ from their more incremental, mainline megachurch counterparts. Instead of Peachtree Road addresses on Atlanta’s historic premier corridor, Passion City Church and Buckhead Church are closer to major transportation access points, I-85 and GA 400. Both new megachurches are within walking distance of the MARTA heavy rail lines and are examples of megachurches built in the city of Atlanta since the MARTA heavy rail lines were built in the late 1970s, early 1980s.

¹⁸ Bratton, Susan, “The Megachurch in the Landscape: Adapting to Changing Sale and Managing Integrated Space in Texas and Oklahoma.” *Worldviews* Vol. 16, No. 1 (2012), pp. 33.

¹⁹ Fitzgerald, F., 2007, “Come one, come all: building a megachurch in New England,” *The New Yorker*, 3 December, pp. 46-56, (accessed online <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2007/12/03/come-one-come-all-2multi-use>, December 9, 2018)

²⁰ Ippolito, Milo. “Metro Atlanta’s Megachurches: Buckhead has 5 of the largest - Civic groups cite ‘positive influence,’” *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, April 24, 2003, final edition, in News Bank (Accessed online December 11, 2018).

Another defining characteristic of megachurches is that they are multi-use, offering, for example, coffee shops, book stores, gyms, schools, counselling centers and a host of other services on site.²¹ Other examples of multi-uses are ESL, sports classes, “support groups for cancer, drug and alcohol rehabilitation.”²² A central and unavoidable challenge to street life in cities is the ubiquity of urban campuses, which threaten the diversity of street life. Unlike mixed uses, which add variety that enlivens sidewalks, Jacobs warns against the effects of “massive single uses.”²³ While some infrastructure borders are more obvious such as railroads and highways, others may be less saliently so, but are almost as equally disruptive: universities, hospitals and governmental centers.²⁴ Jane Jacobs warns of the effects of single uses, “They form borders, and borders in cities usually make destructive neighbors.”²⁵ Due to the size of their campuses and the single uses regularly found in them, megachurches are prone to take on the vacuum characteristics of borders. One main reason that megachurches create border vacuums is that the structures are often set back significantly from the street, surrounded by a sea of parking, constructed for the peak Sundays of the year such as Christmas and Easter.

The two new intown megachurches provide different examples of site design as well as transportation strategies. Passion City Church retrofitted an old big box suburban style Home Depot building.²⁶ Urban designers, Ellen Dunham-Jones and June Williamson list megachurch

²¹ Bratton, Susan, 33.

²² Paynes, Doug, “Metro Atlanta’s Megachurches: Woodstock Baptists invite more growth.”

²³ Jacobs, 336.

²⁴ Ibid., 336-337.

²⁵ Ibid., 336.

²⁶ Ariel Kass, “Church takes over former big box space,” *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, Sept 03, 2010, final edition, <https://www.ajc.com/business/church-takes-over-former-big-box-space/Pmz5yvVEIOJId0Q2gHdQP/> (accessed December 7, 2018).

retrofits as examples of greyfield redevelopment and provide another Georgian example, explaining that a K-MART was adapted into a megachurch in Woodstock, Georgia.²⁷ While car centric megachurches can create border vacuums, there are also positive effects of retrofitted megachurches. Reused buildings result in cheaper transactions than new construction, enabling large congregations to reside and remain within the city of Atlanta, rather than follow the trend of churches like First Baptist Atlanta and move out to the suburbs, removing social capital from the city.²⁸ Jacobs argues for the importance of building age diversity as it allows for a variety of uses, especially for non-profits and artists who could not afford the cost of new construction.²⁹ While Passion City Church, a leading church nationally amongst emerging millennial and generation Z evangelicals, repurposed a building, the large site did not alter the car centric design, even though it is less than half a mile from the MARTA headquarters and MARTA Lindbergh TOD.

Buckhead Church, took a different approach to managing the transportation challenges of a megachurch. Buckhead Church sits in the most dense location compared to other megachurches within the City of Atlanta. Buckhead Church pursued innovative transportation management solutions to their mobility and access needs.³⁰ Prior to building their permanent location, parking was a challenge. The church's site was chosen so that parking primarily used on during the work week could provide additional parking for the church, one of the principles of

²⁷ Ellen Dunham-Jones and June Williamson, June, "Retrofitting Suburbs", (Urban Land Magazine, June 2009), 40.

²⁸ Martin, Sinderman. "First Baptist Church Profits from Relocating North," *Atlanta Business Chronicle*, February 5, 2001, <https://www.bizjournals.com/atlanta/stories/2001/02/05/focus9.html> (accessed December 7, 2018).

²⁹ Jacobs, 244.

³⁰ Lori Johnston, "Tower Place Integrates Church into the mix," *Atlanta Business Chronicle*. May 9, 2005. Accessed December 12, 2018. <https://www.bizjournals.com/atlanta/stories/2005/05/09/focus10.html>

Tower Place, the site that includes Buckhead Church, commented “We're adjacent to Buckhead MARTA station. Any urbanite can attend the church. We did not have to build any more parking structure in this dense mixed-use urban environment, which everybody applauds. It's vertical in that respect. This is all good, appropriate, to some degree cutting-edge land-use policy.”³¹ But can the practices of Buckhead Church be replicated, and do they consist of best practices for megachurches and how they think about site location, and transportation management?

In light of these examples of how megachurches have acted on urban design, church leaders should rigorously examine how the land use patterns of megachurches impact the street life of our cities and our neighborhoods. White evangelical Protestants make up the largest religious affiliation in Georgia, at 28% of the population.³² Thus decisions that evangelical church leadership make about their institution's land use, parking, transportation choice and funding, especially in the megachurch context, have the potential to influence and activate street life throughout Metro Atlanta.

Methodology

Existing Conditions

One church in particular was chosen for this study. In the spirit of full disclosure, the principle investigator of this paper is a ruler elder at Peachtree Presbyterian Church. Peachtree Presbyterian's campus includes 11.3 acres on the west side of Roswell Road. This portion is considered the main campus and includes the Sanctuary, the Kellett Chapel, the Wilson Chapel,

³¹ Lori Johnston, “Tower Place Integrates Church into the mix,” *Atlanta Business Chronicle*.

³² Niraj Chokshi, “The religious states of America, in 22 maps,” *Washington Post*, February 26, 2015, https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/govbeat/wp/2015/02/26/the-religious-states-of-america-in-22-maps/?utm_term=.dcfb83048e0f (accessed: December 7, 2018).

the gym, the Choir and music facilities, the Fellowship Hall, as well as all adult and young children Sunday School rooms. This site includes the original site plan for the church's current Roswell Road location. In addition to the 11.3 acres on the east side, the church owns multiple parcels on the west side of Roswell Road, as well as an easement underneath Roswell Road as both sides of Roswell Road are connected by a tunnel. On the west side of Roswell Road is the newer portion of the church campus, which includes the Lodge, the coffee shop, and youth facilities, as well as the Dogwood Parking garage in the rear of the parking lot. Heading north on Roswell Road on the west side is Roswell Court Apartments. The church currently owns almost 90% of the condos, which they rent out. The apartments are garden style apartments with soaring magnolia trees and lush lawns and remain one of the largest collections of affordable housing in Buckhead.

Peachtree Presbyterian is a multi-generation congregation, with a large demographic subsets in the 70+ range, as well as substantial number of young families and children, as well as a growing young adults community. Church leadership should consider designing different parking engagement strategies for the expansive scope of the church's attendees and membership, especially for peak Sundays such as Christmas and Easter. Deanne Townsend, Director of Children's Ministries explained some of the key challenges families with small children face as their parents try to get their children to Sunday School at the 10:00AM hour, "Our greatest challenge for families is that there is no parking for them near the Family Common's entrance. For visitors, the challenges are: knowing where to park, where to enter for families, and getting from Children's Ministry over to the sanctuary."³³ The lack of dedicated parking spaces for families with young children, greatly extends the time it takes for families to

³³ Email Interview with Deanne Townsend, Director of Children's Ministry, March 25, 2019

park their vehicles to arrive at their desired programming, either Sunday School or the main church service. Director Townsend clarified that “it’s not unusual for it to take 20-25 minutes for a family to park, settle their children and get to worship.”³⁴ According to research done by church management consultants hired by Peachtree Presbyterian Church, visitors decided whether that will return to a church within 11 minutes of setting foot on the church’s campus.³⁵ Thus it is likely that unless the 20-25 minutes it takes a visiting family to find Sunday school is filled with moments that create community and a sense of belonging, the lengthy time it takes parents to find Sunday School will be a detriment to convincing families to return to Peachtree.

The tension between hospitality and catering to the guests needs, verses a long range, sustainable land use policies. Andy Stanley, pastor and leader of North Point Ministries which reaches 38,000 a week on Sundays in the Atlanta metro area, as well as lead preacher a Buckhead Church, provides some perspective: “We must remove every possible obstacle from the path of the disinterested, suspicious, here-against-my-will, would-rather-be-somewhere-else, unchurched guests. The parking lot, the hallways, the auditorium and stage must be obstacle-free zones.”³⁶

Authors and evangelical church growth consultants and advisors, Greg Atkinson and Ray Johnston emphasize hospitality and making it easy for first time attendees to navigate church campuses: “I always encourage churches that have designated Visitor Parking to change it to Guest Parking. It’s a mindset and approach to first impressions that speaks volumes. The way I

³⁴ Email Interview with Deanne Townsend, Director of Children’s Ministry, March 25, 2019.

³⁵ Will Mancini, “7 Checkpoints that Make a Great Guest Experience for Your Church,” <https://www.willmancini.com/blog/7-checkpoints-that-make-a-great-guest-experience-for-your-church-1>

³⁶ Greg Atkinson and Ray Johnston, *Secrets of a Secret Shopper: Reaching and Keeping Church Guests*, *Reaching and Keeping Church Guests*, (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publisher, 2017), 31.

describe it to churches that I consult is if you were having company over to your home, you would clean up. In the same way, we have “company” or “guests” each week at our churches, and we need to be prepared.”³⁷ There is much that can be done to facilitate smoothly navigating complex churches and the human element contributes significantly. For the purpose of this study the paper will focus mostly on understanding peak parking utilization and assess Peachtree Presbyterian’s future parking needs.

³⁷ Greg Atkinson and Ray Johnston, *Secrets of a Secret Shopper: Reaching and Keeping Church Guests*, 145.

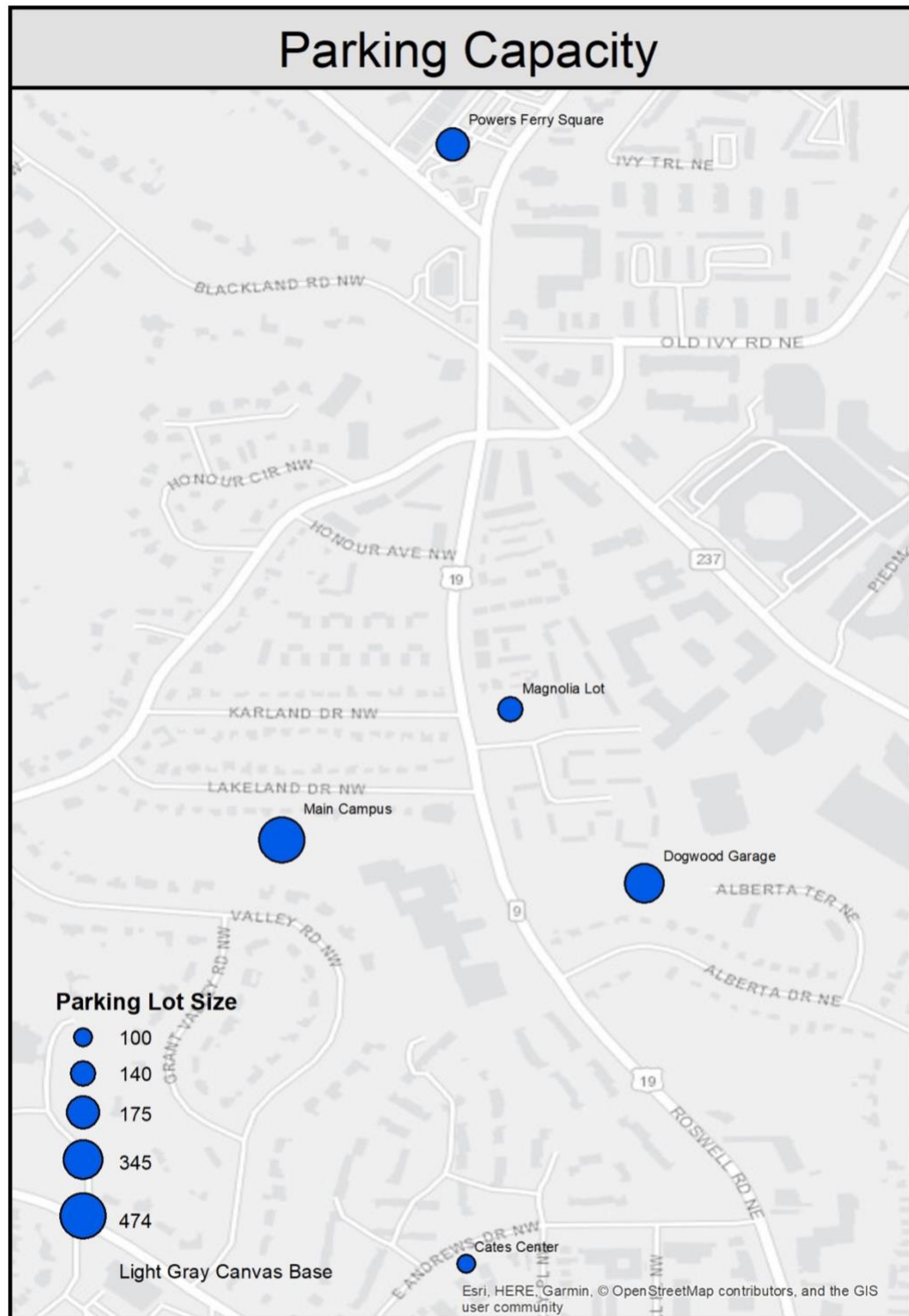


Figure 2: Parking Capacity (on and off-site)

On-site parking lots

Below is a set of images documenting the amount of parking on-site at the church. The onsite parking adds up to a total of 959 spaces. A preliminary parking capacity assessment was provided by Charles Hodnett, with initial numbers from Lord Aeck Sargant. Director Hodnett suggested the numbers were a bit off so while providing their tallies and recommended a recount of the parking spaces. Director Hodnett also stressed that the parking spaces had been restriped since Peachtree's previous tallies, so it made sense to update the assessment of their parking. The numbers he provided were preliminary numbers counted as part of a master plan by a team of private consultants.

Table 1: Total Parking Capacity

Peachtree Pres Parking Capacity	Georgia Tech Recount	Lord Aeck Sargant
Main Campus	474	457
Dogwood Garage	345	344
Magnolia Lot	140	139
Total	959	940



Figure 3. (a) Family Commons (33 parking spaces) (b) Rear Surface Lot (257 spaces)



Figure 3. (c) New Guest Parking (22 spaces) (d) Guest Parking by Gym (33 spaces) and Front of Gym (13 Spaces)



Figure 3. (e) Parking by Choir (36 spaces) (f) Parking behind Church

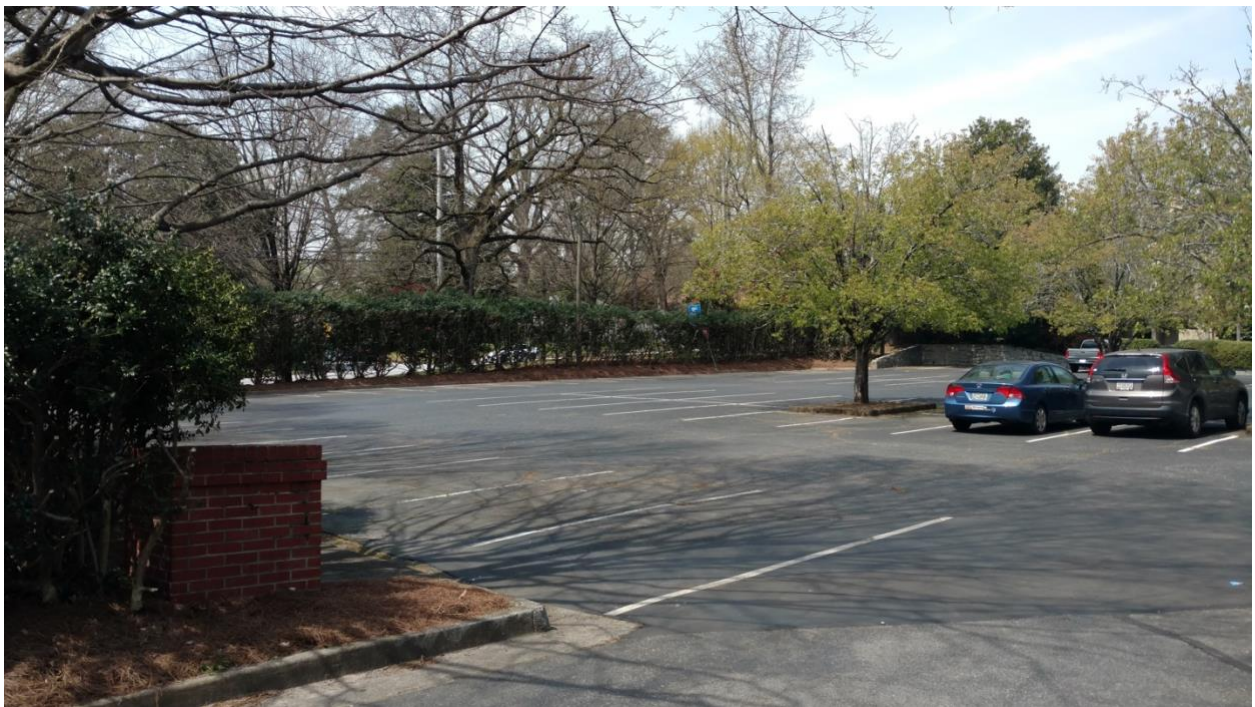


Figure 4. Magnolia Parking Garage (140 spaces)



Figure 5. Dogwood Parking Garage (345 spaces)

Data Collection

The research team conducted parking utilization counts on two Sundays in March 2019: March 17th, March 24th. On March 17th and March 24th the data was collected by three individuals equipped with manual, hand-help counters, including the principle investigator of this paper. The parking space inventory was counted by the principle investigator on a number of Sundays in March and April 2019. All of the pictures were taken by the principle investigator.



Source: Charles Hodnett, Facilities Director, Peachtree Pres

Figure 6: Parking Counts provided by Lord Aeck Sargent

Results

Composite tallies were created by combining the totals from March 17th and March 24th, 2019 since the entirety of the campus was not counted simultaneously for all services.

Table 2: Parking Utilization

	Available Parking	Composite 8:45AM	Capacity 8:45 AM	Composite 10:00AM	Capacity 10:00 AM	Composite 11:15AM	Capacity 11:15 AM
Main Campus	474	365	77%	465	98%	277	58%
Dogwood Garage	345	58	17%	242	70%	143	41%
Magnolia Lot	140	27	19%	68	49%	50	36%
Total	959	450	47%	775	81%	470	49%
Off-Site:							
Powers-Ferry	175	18	10%	96	55%	53	30%
Cates Center	100	27	27%	65	65%	44	44%
Total	275	45	16%	161	59%	97	35%

Parking Utilization At 8.45 AM Service

Parking Utilization

Light Gray Canvas Base	10.29
	16.81
	19.29
	27
	77

Esri, HERE, Garmin, © OpenStreetMap contributors, and the GIS user community

Figure 7: Parking Utilization (percent) at 8:45 AM service

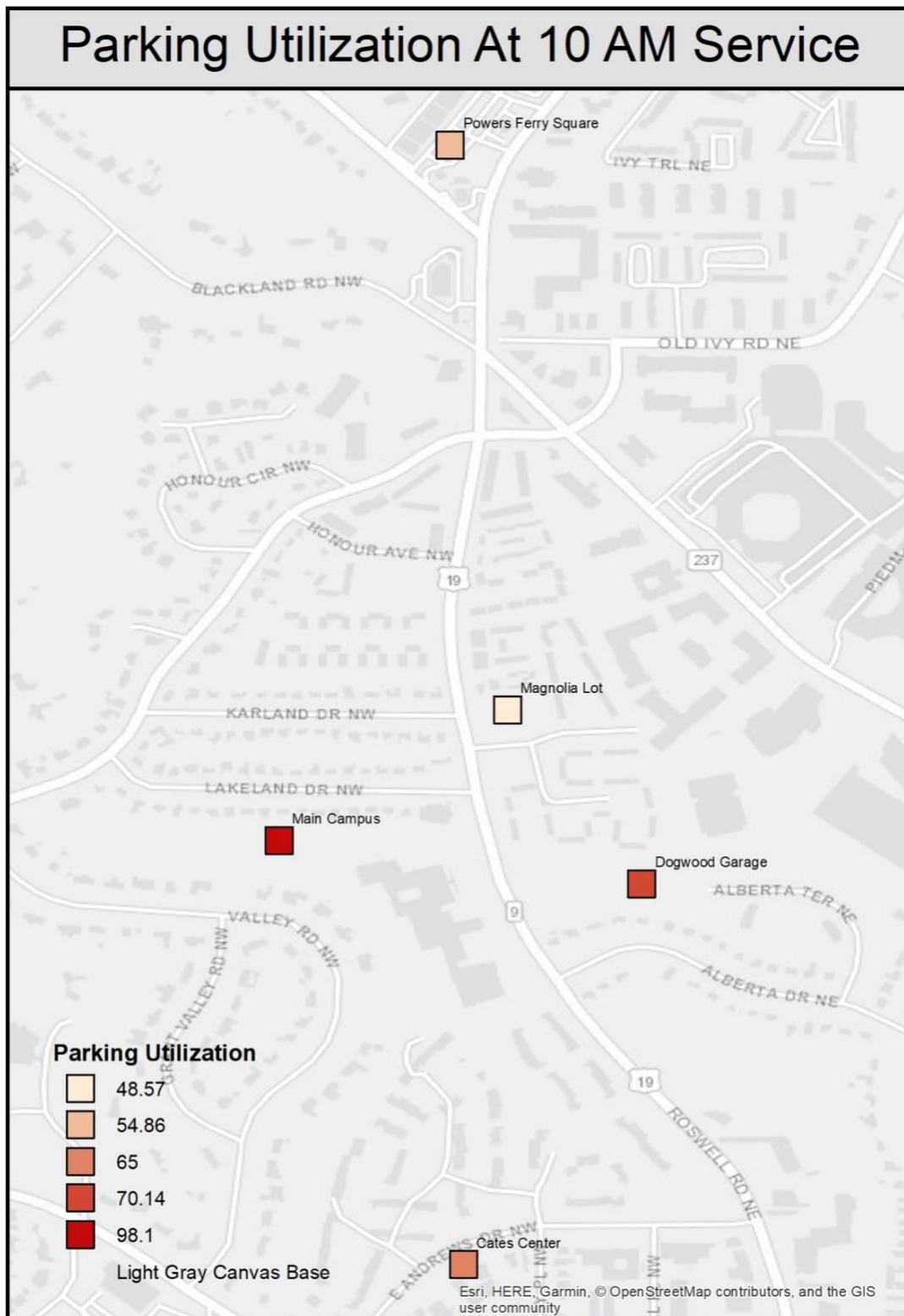


Figure 8: Parking Utilization (percent) at 10:00 AM service

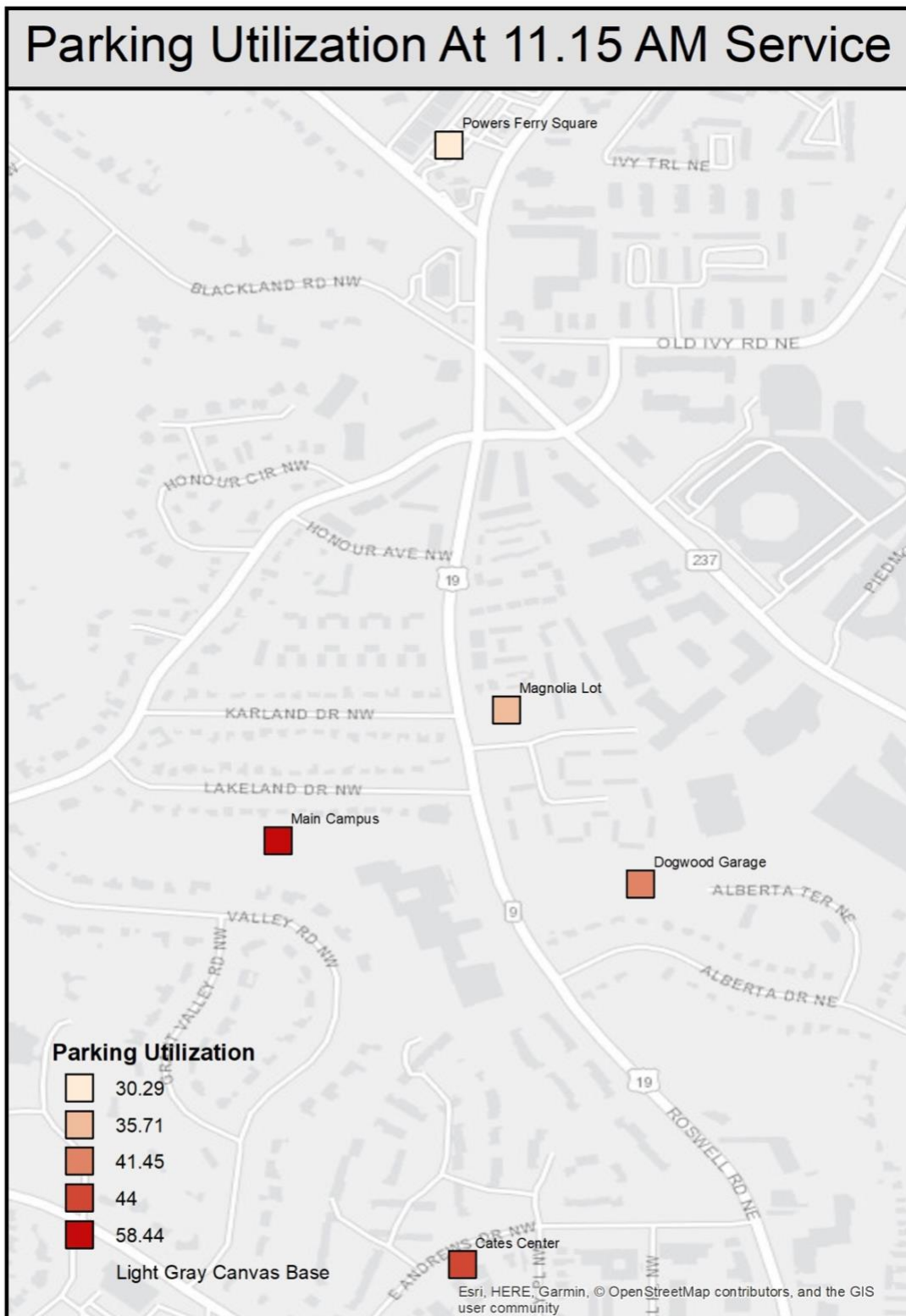


Figure 9: Parking Utilization (percent) at 11:15 AM service

The composite tallies were compiled because there was no reason based in sound theory to discount the Sundays are irregular or distinct from one another. Private school spring break in Atlanta was March 2nd-March 10th, 2019 and Atlanta Public Schools' Spring break was from March 31st, 2019. Since the data was collective during March 2019, in order to better project parking demand and Peachtree Express shuttle demand throughout the year, especially during the peak holiday seasons, proportional multipliers were used based on historic shuttle budget data. March is a relatively lighter month regarding church attendance and parking needs. According to the Peachtree Express Shuttle budget, the shuttle costs are only lower one month during the year than the amount paid in March. June has the lowest ridership and parking demand. Although March is a considerably low figure, it shares the 2nd to lowest shuttle amount with four other months. Half of the months of the year have higher Peachtree Express shuttle budgets and projected ridership. Although December was initially considered as the model for peak parking representation, since December is such an outlier, loaded with so many more services that the rest of the months due to many additional services, including the four Christmas Eve services, April 2018 was chosen to represent the peak, since Easter occurred in 2018 in April.

Table 3: Projected Annual Off-site Parking Utilization

	Peachtree Express Budget 2018	10:00AM	Capacity
January	\$14,845.44	729	61%
February	\$14,200.00	698	59%
March	\$14,200.00	698	59%
April	\$18,350.00	1,165	98%
May	\$15,325.00	753	63%
June	\$13,000.00	639	54%
July	\$17,600.00	865	73%
August	\$14,200.00	698	59%
September	\$17,600.00	865	73%
October	\$14,200.00	698	59%
November	\$14,200.00	698	59%
December	\$22,763.00	**	
Total	\$190,483.44		65%

**December not used to measure 10:00AM capacity due to the four Christmas Eve services

Analysis

The main lot on the main campus side of Roswell Road (West Campus) reaches full capacity at the 10:00AM hour, the top attendance hour for Peachtree Presbyterian, which features both worship and the main School Sunday hour of the church. The facilities director, Mr. Hodnett verified that aligned with continual internal parking counts of the 10:00AM hour. Full capacity at the 10:00AM poses challenges for subgroups of the attending population, particularly the elderly, those with physical limitations, as well as families with young children. There are no parking spots designated for families with young children at Peachtree Presbyterian Church. Full capacity during the peak service and Sunday School hour also poses challenges for guest and newcomers trying to navigate Peachtree's myriad of parking options. All other parking options beyond the Main Lots require more complex trips to reach the sanctuary, including crossing Roswell Road (albeit there is strong police cross guard presence and a traffic light).

Underused Assets at the 10:00AM – The Weekly Peak

One of the more complicated options is parking on Peachtree owned property, but north of the Main Lot, at the Magnolia lot. The Magnolia lot had capacity under 50% at all services, data that was in line with the projection provided by the facilities director. Even at the 10:00AM service, the Magnolia lot was only at 48.6% capacity. The Magnolia lot is not far from the sanctuary, only a 0.2 mile walk, in good weather is an attractive walk. Besides one major sink hole in the side walk, the side walk is pleasant, removed from the road by a generous grassy median. Portions of the main campus parking lots are equal distance from the sanctuary as the Magnolia lot and besides the necessity of crossing Roswell Road, from a visual and placemaking perspective, the walk provides more scenic and guided pathway, with soaring views of steeped Kellett Chapel and Peachtree's main sanctuary.

The Magnolia lot has both benefits and slight challenges to its location. It's a smaller lot with a quicker exit to Roswell Road, potential a more attractive exit than waiting behind lots of parking attendees at the trying to leave the Dogwood garage, especially after the 10:00AM hour. One challenging aspect of the Magnolia lot is exiting turning left on Roswell Road. Exiting the Dogwood garage lot is significantly easier turning left and there is a traffic light and significant police presence guiding and directing traffic. The police do not direct traffic at the Magnolia lot and often cars struggle to turning left, at times turning right, turning immediately into a side street and then turning around to go south on Roswell Road. Although there is signage and a tent outside by the side of the road for the Magnolia lot, it is more intimidating for guests and newer attendees to locate the Magnolia lot. Driving north on Roswell Road to the Magnolia lot requires driving past the church, a less intuitive option for newcomers. Driving south on Roswell Road towards the church requires attendees to make a left hand off of Roswell Road before the church is in sight, a less than optimal choice for newcomers who might not know how close they

actually are to the church and would want to confirm that they are in fact at the right place. There is significant potential in expanding usage of the Magnolia lot, especially by regular attendees.

The Peachtree Express Shuttle

The Peachtree Express Shuttle runs during all services and connects Peachtree Pres with two off-site parking lots (see Figure 7, Figure 8 and Figure 9 for lot locations). There is considerable room to expand Peachtree Express Ridership in all services, but most importantly during the peak 10:00AM hour. In absolute parking spaces available, both the Powers Ferry and Cates Center site provide the most room from expanded parking usage, while in relative terms, the Magnolia lot remains the most underutilized. Projecting for the absolute peak holy day seasons, the offsite parking is edging toward capacity in our current allotment, especially at the Cates site. The Cates Center site also offer less room to potentially expand. The allotment of Peachtree Church parking at the Powers Ferry site, on the other hand, has more room for expansion. Expanding the parking area at Powers Ferry, however, could potentially make it less attractive for the elderly, as in the current arraignment the Peachtree Express provides some of the best door-to-door service. In the catchment area for parking at the offsite locations were expanded considerably, without preserving spots for the elderly or physically limited individuals to have priority access, this could make the offsite locations less attractive for one of the more vulnerable subgroups of attendees.

There were multiple ways to measure capacity at the offsite lots. Aggregating capacity across all service, across the entire year has limited value, as it provides less insight into where our pressure points are for capacity and miss some of the potential areas for expansion and growth. Across all services there is a vacancy rate of 59%, which might suggest that we have over extended capacity. But planning for the peak with flexible offsite parking, builds

institutional habits and micro-communities which help spread the word that offsite parking is easy, convenient and even fun, adding resiliency and redundancy to the parking model in times of peak.





Figure 10. Peachtree Express Pick-up/Drop-off

Wayfinding Improvements

In the Spring 2019, Peachtree Church initiated new way finding measures (see in the pictures below) to help attendees navigate their parking options. The signage marks a significant improve and could be expanded to include recommendations for families with small children. The signage also features Peachtree's new logo.



Figure 11. Examples of recent Wayfinding improvements

Recommendations

Since Dr. Reverend Richard Kannwischer has led Peachtree Presbyterian Church, he has launched the new missional strategy, “To Behold in Worship, Belong in Community and Become on a Journey.” Any revamped transportation strategy should be housed within the hospitality and campus navigation initiative and be further grounded in the “Belong in Community Strategy.” Current elder Jane Young and member of Peachtree Presbyterian for over 50 years, talks of the unmatched shared community she experienced with members and regular attendees of the church on the Peachtree Express, replete with moments of initial unexpected togetherness and friendships and connections were made across generations on the regular bus trips between the offsite parking garages and the entrance to the Family Commons on Peachtree’s campus. Increasing utilization of the Peachtree Express Shuttle lessens the burden of increasing onsite parking capacity and reduces the overall impervious land use in the neighborhood. Relying on nearby underused parking capacity Sunday mornings is a win-win strategy for both the church and its neighbors, all while building community among the bus patrons riding the short trip to church together.

Peachtree’s parking recommendations and strategies should be guided by Peachtree’s mission and belonging communities initiative. Strategies should be encouraged through any mediums deemed appropriate, but announcements from the pulpit should be considered. When was last time there has been a deliberate effort to promote the shuttle service? Dr. Reverend Rich Kannwischer encouraged members to consider using rideshare services on Christmas Eve. On a special event in early January 2019 Dr. Rev. Kannwischer promoted the use of scooters in light of a special event at the church.



Figure 12: Parked E-Scooter

While scooters may pose one aspect of a solution strategy to mitigate peak parking challenges, Peachtree should consider any liability issues that could arise from accidents on Peachtree's property, as well as the negative visual externalities if no designated scooter parking location is established.

Peachtree should also consider their close proximity to MARTA's heavy rail station at Buckhead and consider whether the Buckhead Station could be a Peachtree Express pick-up and drop-off location. While it the current public transit trends of Peachtree Pres should be investigated, Peachtree should not only plan for the current penchant Peachtree Pres attendees and members have for transit, but also consider how to make their church more accessible to transit reliant members of the Atlanta community and to encourage Peachtree Church members to utilize and support their public transit entities to become a more participatory member of public institutions in the region.

Peachtree should designate portions of the back main lot for families with young children, in the manner in which Buckhead church provides such amenities, Andy Stanley, one of the most prominent pastor of megachurches in the Atlanta Metro region, pastor of North Point Ministries with around 38,000 attendees, has a different perspective, “We have reserved parking for parents with preschoolers. I don’t have a reserved parking spot.”³⁸

The availability of parking at the Magnolia lot for all services should be emphasized, as well as the pleasant walk. The sinkhole in the sidewalk, however, should be repaired. Peachtree should also consider stationing a police officer to help attendees turn onto Roswell Road when exiting the parking lot as it poses a risk, especially the left-hand turns.

Conclusion

As urban and suburban churches expand dramatically as part of the agglomeration effects of many institutions in urban environments, churches should consider carefully how their form and landscape advances the mission of the church. These sites should be rooted in the values of accessibility, hospitality and ultimately sustainability. If the foundational characteristic institutional church’s physical site “makes [for] destructive neighbors,” as Jane Jacobs warns all large institutions are more prone to become, does this undermine church’s ability to uphold most important commandment in Christianity second to loving God, “Love your neighbor as yourself”?³⁹ Peachtree Presbyterian Church should embrace policies that help their mobility challenged members to comfortably access their worshipping spaces to participate as fully as possible in the life of the church, as well as enable their guests to seamlessly discover this house of worship.

³⁸ Andy Stanley, 81.

³⁹ Mark 12:31a

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